



Course	GOVT2306.HN3
Course Title	State and Local Government
Professor	Joshua Montgomery
Term	Spring 2026
Meetings	Monday & Wednesday 1:00pm - 2:15pm Administration Building – AD 2.238

CONTACT INFORMATION

Professor Name	Dr. Joshua Montgomery
Office Location	Physics Building (PHY) 1.702
Email Address	Joshua.Montgomery@utdallas.edu
Office Hours	10am-11am MW (in office); 11am-12pm T (on Teams); and by appointment.

GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION

Course Description

Survey of state and local government and politics with special reference to the constitution and politics of Texas.

Student Learning Objectives

- Think critically about issues related to government and politics—analyze and appreciate historical trends in the development of government institutions (constitutions, branches of government, political parties, elections, etc.), and apply knowledge of government institutions and theoretical and scholarly approaches to understand government behavior and current events.
- Understand the historical evolution of Texas constitutions from independence and early statehood to the present, focusing on the key political, social, and economic factors that shaped each version and their relationship to federal principles.
- Communicate effectively and responsibly positions on political issues to fellow students, community members, and public officials. Recognize the social consequences of individual and governmental actions; and engage in civic life with awareness, empathy, and a sense of public responsibility.
- Exercise informed judgment in the ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence tools. Critically evaluate AI-generated information, recognize its limitations and biases, and use such tools appropriately to support (rather than replace) original analysis, research, and communication in the study of government and politics.

Student Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the influence founding principles have on today's political structure, including current political and policy debates.
2. Describe state and local political systems and their ever-changing relationship to the federal government.
3. Assess the design and function of states' executive, legislative, and judicial branches in comparison to other states/the federal government.
4. Examine the impact of evolving civil rights and civil liberties protections on state governance.
5. Analyze issues, public policies, and political culture in the U.S. from an empirical (e.g., evidence-based) rather than opinionated frame.
6. Identify, describe, and analyze various mechanisms of citizen political involvement including public opinion, political parties, interest groups, and electoral processes.
7. Apply important theoretical and scholarly approaches to understanding state and local institutions' behavior, citizen involvement, and interactions between citizens and institutions of government.
8. Use artificial intelligence tools responsibly to support research, analysis, and communication in the study of state and local government.
9. Consider the above factors when designing, strategizing, and proposing workable policy solutions to complex governmental and societal problems facing state and local governments today.

Required Textbooks and Materials:

This course will draw on a number of sources including books, articles, news stories, and videos. These materials will be posted in eLearning or can be accessed through the UT Dallas Library.

The primary texts for the course are:

- Chriss, William J. 2024. *Six Constitutions Over Texas: Texas' Political Identity, 1830–1900*. Texas A&M University Press.

Modality: In-Person

The course is set to be taught as an in-person course meaning students are expected to attend class. If university policy requires the modality of course instruction to be adjusted, students will receive an email from the instructor with updated course information.

Course Schedule

Week	Topics	Assignments
Week 1: Begins Jan 20	Class Introduction	Ndihokubwayo article (eLearning)
Week 2: Begins Jan 26	Foundations of Government Intro to Chriss	Chriss: Introduction and Prologue (Appendix optional) Chriss: Chapter 1
Week 3: Begins Feb 2	Early Texas History & Federalism <i>Policy Paper Step 1 Due Feb 8</i>	Chriss: 45-59 Chriss: 80-89
Week 4: Begins Feb 9	TX History Federalism Cont. <i>Policy Paper Step 2 In-Class</i>	<i>Declaration of Causes</i> (eLearning) Chriss: 90-105
Week 5: Begins Feb 16	Texas Reconstruction & Federalism <i>Policy Paper Step 3 Due Feb 22</i>	Chriss: 105-126 Morphis Dedication & Chapter 17 (on eLearning)
Week 6: Begins Feb 23	Texas Political Culture <i>EXAM #1 Feb 25</i>	Joseph article (eLearning) NYT vs. Houston Chronicle (eLearning)
Week 7: Begins Mar 2	Elections, Parties, & Polarization <i>Policy Paper Step 4 In Class</i>	Guo article (eLearning) Goodman, Sandoval, & Gebeloff article (eLearning)
Week 8: Begins Mar 9	Interest Groups and Lobbying	<i>Federalist 10</i> (eLearning) Anderson article (eLearning) TPR article (eLearning)
Spring Break – March 16 to March 22 – NO CLASS		
Week 9: Begins Mar 23	Texas Legislative Branch <i>Policy Paper Step 5 Due Mar 29</i>	Betts article (eLearning) <i>In re Greg Abbott (2021)</i> (eLearning)
Week 10: Begins Mar 30	Texas Executive Branch	Beal article (eLearning)
Week 11: Begins Apr 6	Texas Judicial Branch & Criminal Justice <i>Policy Paper Step 6 Due Apr 12</i>	Niven and Rock article (eLearning)
Week 12: Begins Apr 13	State & Local Government	<i>Abbott v. Harris County et al. (2023)</i> (eLearning)
Week 13: Begins Apr 20	Taxes and Spending <i>Policy Paper Step 7 Due Apr 26</i>	School voucher articles (eLearning)
Week 14: Begins Apr 27	Environment	Martinez article (eLearning) Two Houston Public Media articles (eLearning)
Week 15: Begins May 4	Policy Paper Presentations & Course Wrap-Up <i>EXAM #2 May 6</i>	

Graded Assignment Schedule

Assignment	Date Due
Discussion Posts	Every Sunday at 11:59pm
In-Class Readings Quiz	Approximately once a week (in class)
Exam #1	Feb 25 (in-class)
Policy Paper	See Policy Paper Schedule
Exam #2	May 6 (in-class)

Course Assessment

Course assessment will be completed using attendance, homework, quizzes, exams, discussion posts, and a policy paper.

Assignment	Weight
Attendance and Participation	20%
In-Class Readings Quiz	5%
Discussion Posts	15%
Policy Paper Assignments	40%
Two Exams	20%
Total	100%

Policy Paper Assignment Schedule	Date	Weight
Step 1: Policy Paper Decision Guide	Feb 8, 11:59pm	15%
Step 2: In-Class Policy Analysis & AI Prompt Creation	Feb 11, In-Class	10%
Step 3: AI-Assisted Policy Development & Output Evaluation	Feb 22, 11:59pm	10%
Step 4: In-Class Paper Drafting	Mar 4, In-Class	10%
Step 5: Policy Paper	Mar 29, 11:59pm	40%
Step 6: Professional AI Use Post-Submission Exercise	Apr 12, 11:59pm	10%
Step 7: Policy Paper Presentation Slide	Apr 26, 11:59pm	5%
Total		100%

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS

Attendance and Participation – 20%

An important element of this honors seminar is active participation in class discussion, debate and analysis. Be prepared to talk. Regular class attendance is expected. Students who fail to attend and participate in class regularly are inviting scholastic difficulty. That said, I understand that life events sometimes require students to miss class and I will automatically excuse two (2) missed classes. Additional excuses may be granted in the event of a medical emergency or school-sanctioned activity; documentation is required and approval is subject to instructor discretion.

In-Class Readings Quiz – 5%

Most weeks will include a brief 1-2 question quiz taken in-class on the reading material for that week. It is imperative that students complete assigned readings on schedule in order to understand course content and meaningfully participate in class discussions.

Discussion Posts – 15%

Students are required to post two (2) **substantive** comments for each week's discussion board. One comment must respond to the prompt and one comment must respond to the post of another student. All of the requirements for in-person civility also apply to online conversations. Everyone will be expected to demonstrate a respect for the thoughts, opinions and beliefs of others—this does not require agreement, but civility.

Policy Paper Assignments – 40%

Students are required to write a policy paper addressing a Texas policy of their choice. A policy paper that advocates for a change in state policy or the creation of an entirely new policy is acceptable.

Writing this policy paper is an important part of this course. This assignment is broken into seven components designed to teach students the process of writing a policy paper through idea generation, research, drafting, writing, and presenting (actually presenting is optional). As part of this process students will learn how to use AI models in a responsible and ethical manner. Each component of the policy paper assignment includes a rubric that outlines expectations and grading criteria. These will be posted on eLearning. The policy paper itself must be submitted through TurnItIn on eLearning in pdf format.

The different components, their due dates, and grading weight are listed in the **Policy Paper Assignment Schedule** above.

2 Exams – 20%

Students will take two in-class exams. The exams may cover material from assigned readings, lectures, and discussion posts. **There is no final exam.**

GENERAL COURSE POLICIES

Technology in the Classroom

Unless explicitly permitted by the instructor or authorized as an accommodation through the AccessAbility Resource Center NO PHONES or COMPUTERS are allowed in class.

Make-Up Exams

ONLY medical emergencies and school-sanctioned activities are acceptable reasons to request a make-up exam. Documentation of the absence is required to schedule a make-up exam and approval is subject to the instructor's discretion. All make-up exams must be completed within one week of the scheduled due date.

Late Work

Late work is not accepted. Exceptions may be granted with penalty at the instructor's discretion.

Extra Credit

No individual extra credit opportunities are offered in this course. Extra credit for the entirety of the class may be offered at the instructor's discretion.

Communication

- Emails to me about the course must be sent using your UT Dallas email and list the section number in the subject line. Failure to do so may result in a delayed response. Per UT Dallas policy, I will not respond to student emails sent from non-UT Dallas email accounts.
- Expect all email messages to be responded to within two business days.
- I will not reveal grades by phone or non-UTD email, as per FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) policy. Grades will appear on ELEARNING once assignments and exams are completed. Official grades are distributed by UTD at the end of semester.

Syllabus Changes

The instructor reserves the right to amend this syllabus during the semester. Any changes will be announced in class, in an email, and on e-Learning. Students will be responsible for getting and following the new information.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Plagiarism

Some assignments in this course permit or require the use of AI models. Students are expected to adhere to the rules in these assignments as required by UT Dallas Policy UTDSP5017 Generative AI Use in Academic Work: <https://policy.utdallas.edu/utdsp5017>.

Unless explicitly authorized, students may not use AI tools to produce any written content that is turned in for a grade. This includes, but is not limited to exams, discussion posts, papers, or presentations. The use of Grammarly and other similar programs or writing services is prohibited. Generative AI may be consulted for idea generation and research—but I strongly recommend independently verifying any results obtained through such tools.

Unauthorized use of AI will be considered plagiarism and a violation of academic integrity. Students engaging in unauthorized use of AI are subject to disciplinary action as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct and other applicable university and Honors Program rules.

Course Citizenship

Course material may cover topics that some considered to be controversial or provocative - the instructor will present this material in the context of the subject being discussed. It is incumbent on students to treat all members of the classroom with respect and to maintain a cordial atmosphere as we engage in relevant discussions of political importance.

Grading Scale

Consistent with UT Dallas policy, students are graded on a plus/minus scale. *Grades will not be rounded in this course.*

UNIVERSITY STANDARD GRADING SCALE

Grading Schema and Grading Criteria: The grading scale is the standard undergraduate scale, with the point scale outlined below: A+ = 97 and above, A = 94-96, A- = 90-93, B+ = 87-89, B = 84-86, B- = 80-83, C+ = 77-79, C = 74-76, C- = 70-73, D+ = 67-69, D = 64-66, D- = 60-63, and F = below 60.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

The following link details all key UTD policies, including: confidential information, student conduct, academic integrity, email, grievances, accommodations for disabilities and religious observance, along with student resources. <https://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>

Academic Integrity

Every student at UT Dallas is expected to exercise independent thought and expression as he or she strives for academic achievement. Incorporated in the quest for intellectual growth are the expectations of honesty, originality in written and oral expression, a respect for the exchange of ideas, and acknowledgement and recognition of the abilities and contributions of others. Please see the university's academic integrity page for details and tips: <https://conduct.utdallas.edu/integrity>

Academic dishonesty is unacceptable under any circumstances. This includes but is not limited to plagiarism, collusion, cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, failure to contribute to a collaborative project, and sabotage. If a student is thought to be engaging in academic dishonesty, they will be referred to the Office of Community Standards and Conduct. For additional details on what may constitute academic dishonesty, please refer to the university's webpage: <https://conduct.utdallas.edu/dishonesty>

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The University of Texas at Dallas is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. The syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. If you are seeking classroom accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (2008), you are required to register with the AccessAbility Resource Center (ARC), located in the Administration Building, Suite 2.224. They can be reached by email, calling 972-883-2098, or at their website. To receive academic accommodations for this class, please register and request services by completing the Request for Services form with the proper documentation and meeting with the Director of ARC at the beginning of the semester. The ARC website is: <https://accessability.utdallas.edu/student-accommodations/>

Class Recordings

Students are expected to follow appropriate University policies and maintain the security of passwords used to access recorded lectures. Unless the AccessAbility Resource Center (ARC) has approved the student to record the instruction, students are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course. **Recordings may not be published, reproduced, or shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to other online environments except to implement an accommodation approved by the AccessAbility Resource Center (ARC).** Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Comet Creed

This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:

“As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”

Academic Support Resources

The information contained in the following link lists the University's academic support resources for all students. Please see <http://go.utdallas.edu/academic-support-resources>.

Please review the catalog sections regarding the [credit/no credit](#) or [pass/fail](#) grading option and withdrawal from class.